In the Claims:

The following listing reflects amendments to the claims and replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in this application.

1-21. (Cancelled)

22. (Currently amended) A composition comprising a fragment of an unglycosylated, transmembrane protein ~~having~~ wherein said unglycosylated, transmembrane protein has a molecular weight of about 24 kd as determined by SDS-PAGE, ~~or a fragment thereof,~~ in combination with a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier, wherein said protein is stable to acetone precipitation, and further wherein ~~said protein or~~ said fragment ~~thereof~~ is a truncated form of the protein that lacks a functional portion of a transmembrane domain and specifically binds the E2 protein of hepatitis C virus.

23. (Currently amended) A process for preparing a composition, said process comprising combining a fragment of an unglycosylated, transmembrane protein ~~having~~ wherein said unglycosylated, transmembrane protein has a molecular weight of about 24 kd as determined by SDS-PAGE, ~~or a fragment thereof,~~ with a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier, wherein said protein is stable to acetone precipitation, and further wherein ~~said protein or~~ said fragment ~~thereof~~ is a truncated form of the protein that lacks a functional portion of a transmembrane domain and specifically binds to the E2 protein of hepatitis C virus.

24-25. (Cancelled)

26. (Currently amended) The composition of claim 22, wherein the protein is produced by a method comprising:

(a) providing a mammalian cell that expresses said 24 kd protein;

(b) recovering and solubilizing membranes from said mammalian cell to provide a cell membrane preparation;

(c) subjecting the cell membrane preparation to ammonium sulfate precipitation at less than 33% saturation and retaining the supernatant;

(d) subjecting the supernatant to ammonium sulfate precipitation at between 33% and 50% saturation and retaining the precipitate;

(e) resuspending the precipitate; and

(f) subjecting the precipitate to hydrophobic interaction chromatograpy and recovering the nonretained material; and

(g) cleaving a functional portion of a transmembrane domain out of the recovered material.

27. (Previously presented) The composition of claim 26, wherein the mammalian cell that expresses said 24 kd protein hyperexpresses said 24 kd protein.

28. (Previously presented) The composition of claim 27, wherein the mammalian cell is a MOLT-4 cell.

29. (Previously presented) The composition of claim 28, wherein the cell membrane preparation is a plasma cell membrane preparation.